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# Prologue

Dusk was settling upon the forest as the queen made her way up the ravine. It'd been almost a whole moon since she'd left camp and her sides heaved with effort as she ascended. Dull golden light glittered on her yellow coat as the sun sank between the trees. The stars of Silverpelt would be visible before long.
Once at the top of the ravine the queen stopped to rest. She didn't dare stray far from the ThunderClan camp for fear of leaving her kits too long. That said, it was a relief to escape for a bit. It'd been too long since she'd stretched her legs and felt energy brew in her belly.
*Crack!* A twig snapped loudly, cutting through the queens thoughts abruptly. She leaped to her paws, ready to fight. The golden fur along her spine instantly relaxed as she noticed the black and white warrior peering at her from the brambles.
"Patchpelt!" She purred, her claws sheathing. "You startled me."
"Sorry Goldenflower." The small tom picked his way around the thorns to sit at her side. "I just came to see what you were up to. Swiftkit and Lynxkit are still too small to be alone for long."
Goldenflower gave her mate an affectionate lick around the ears. "I was only going for a quick stretch. Frostfur is watching the kits for me. They're getting big fast!"
Patchpelt didn't say anything. When it came to their kits, he didn't show much interest. Goldenflower was surprised he'd even enquired in the first place. With a start she realised this was the first time she'd seen him since the kits were only a few days old. Had she really been so preoccupied with the newborns that she'd forgotten about her mate?
"You know... you could drop by the nursery sometime. The kits eyes are open now. It won't be long before they start asking about their father." Goldenflower ventured.
Patchpelt squirmed uncomfortably where he sat. His orange eyes were cold and distant.
"Well Goldenflower... Look, I've been thinking," he started. "I really like you and all but, well, these kits were unexpected and I'm not sure I'm right to be a father."

Goldenflower pressed her pelt close to his in comfort. She rested her tail on his spine and gave a soothing purr.
"It's okay to be nervous- I am too! But I think we can be great parents together. Come back to the nursery with me and meet your sons."
Patchpelt flinched away from her words as though he'd been struck.
"You don't understand!" He hissed. "I didn't *want* kits! Goldenflower I think you're beautiful but this isn't what I want. We're friends, not a family!"
*Friends?*
"Wait... so... we aren't mates?" The words tumbled out slowly. Goldenflower's blood had turned to ice. The ground seemed to be swaying beneath her.
"We never were." Patchpelt's angry glare was replaced with a look of sorrow. "I'm sorry Goldenflower, I really am. Tomorrow I'm going to talk to Bluestar about moving into the elders den. I think it's for the best."

It was like Goldenflower was staring at him through a fog. He seemed so far away. So cold. She staggered to her paws and managed to put on a calm expression despite herself.

"That's fine, Patchpelt." She mewed coolly. "I completely understand."

Without another work the beautiful golden tabby turned and fled back into the darkness of the ravine. Only the deep throbbing in her chest betrayed how broken-hearted she felt.

# Chapter 1

"From this moment on, until he has earned his warrior name this cat shall be known as Swiftpaw!" Bluestar's meow rang out loud and clear over the cats gathered in ThunderClan's camp.
Goldenflower felt her heart swell with pride as she watched her son exchange a respectful nod with the Clan leader. He looked so small and nervous compared to the battle-hardened blue-grey she-cat. Just a fragile kit.
*No! Not a kit anymore.*
Her son was an apprentice of ThunderClan. And Goldenflower had every reason to believe he'd grow into a fine young warrior. He had the heart of a warrior already and oneday he'd protect the Clan with the strength of LionClan.
"Longtail," Bluestar continued. "You will mentor Swiftpaw. You had a fine mentor in Darkstripe and I expect you to pass on everything you know to your new apprentice."
The pale tabby tom rose to his paws excitedly and padded forward to touch noses with Swiftpaw. Goldenflower was glad her son would receive training from such a kind warrior. Longtail was young but loyal. Her kit was in good paws.
"Swiftpaw! Swiftpaw!" The chanting was lead by Tigerclaw, ThunderClan's deputy. The others quickly followed his lead and hurried forward to congratulate the new apprentice. Frostfur's kits, Brightkit and Thornkit squealed excitedly from the nursery. It would be their turn soon to become apprentices together.
A sudden stab of grief broke through Goldenflower's pride. Swiftpaw should have gone through the ceremony with his brother at his side. Goldenflower had birthed two kits, not one... Lynxkit had fallen ill at only three moons old. He'd never receive a 'paw name.

The tabby queen scanned the clearing in search for Patchpelt. Surely he too was thinking of the other cat that should be apprenticed?
The black and white tom was sharing tongues with Halftail and One-eye outside the elders den. He showed no interest in participating with the ceremony. Goldenflower wondered if he even

remembered that he was Swiftpaw and Lynxkit's father.
The thought of her old mate and the loss of her kit sent a wave of sadness rushing over Goldenflower. She wanted to go back to the nursery and sleep but she no longer had a nest in there. She would be back to warrior duties and sleeping in the warriors den. Since apprenticed she'd always slept beside Patchpelt. With him in the elders den and Swiftpaw in the apprentices den, Goldenflower would be alone for the first time in her life.
It was almost too much to handle. Goldenflower ran to the dirt place and slipped out the back. It was the easiest way to escape camp without being noticed. Once loose in the forest she began to run. Moons of being a nursing queen had made her soft and her muscles burned as she raced through the trees. Goldenflower didn't know where her paws were taking her. All she knew was that she needed to get away from Patchpelt and the rest of her Clan.
How could he care so little? Even if he had never loved her, Patchpelt and Goldenflower had still been close friends as warriors. Surely that meant *something* to him? Swiftpaw didn't even know who his father was. Goldenflower had decided it was better that way. She didn't want her son to grow up feeling unloved. He only deserved what was best.

Eventually Goldenflower slowed to a brisk walk. Her paws had lead her to the Owl Tree. The tall trunk soared high above her head, reaching to touch the sky. Goldenflower paced at its base and stared at the scrabbly bark. She wondered if she could climb it.

Gathering her weight onto her haunches, she prepared to lead. Goldenflower had never been much of a climber, in fact she was a little afraid of heights. But she was in desperate need of a distraction.

"And what exactly do you think you're doing?" A harsh voice meowed from behind.

Goldenflower's head whipped around in surprise. Three pairs of cold eyes glinted at her through the ferns.

**A/N: OHHHHHH who is it?**
**Let me know what you think of the story so far. It's been a very long time since I wrote anything Warriors related ☺**

# Chapter 2

"Calm down," a familiar voice growled. It's just us. The ferns parted and a huge dark brown tabby padded out towards Goldenflower.

It was Tigerclaw. Sunlight glimmered on the brown tabby's dark coat, making it shine like copper. Every step closer made Goldenflower's heart sink. She just wanted to be left alone. Of all cats, why did ThunderClan's deputy have to catch her being weird? Did StarClan hate her?

Whitestorm and Sandpaw followed closely behind Tigerclaw. Judging by the mouse in Sandpaw's mouth, Goldenflower figured they were a hunting patrol.

"Are you okay?" Whitestorm's voice was concerned. He gave Goldenflower's shoulder caring nudge.

"I'm fine." She meowed stiffly.

"Then why are you here alone?" Tigerclaw's amber eyes were narrow with suspicion. "I don't remember sending you on a patrol."

Goldenflower's heartbeat quickened. "I, uh, just needed to get out of camp."

"Why?"

The golden tabby stared down at her paws. She didn't want to blurt out her emotions to the deputy but she also couldn't bring herself to lie. "I'm just... struggling."

Much to Goldenflower's surprise she saw Tigerclaw's eyes soften. "Whitestorm, you and Sandpaw can continue to hunt without me. Go near the twolegplace. It's been a while since anyone has hunted there."

Whitestorm dipped his head politely and padded away with his apprentice in tow. Tigerclaw waited until the ginger tip of Sandpaw's tail had disappeared before speaking again. He sat down beside Goldenflower just close enough for their fur to brush. He smelt of moss and pinesap.

"Now, what's going on?" Tigerclaw asked.

Goldenflower remained silent. She felt so silly, her problems were trivial. She didn't want to show such weakness in front of the noble warrior.

"You know," Tigerclaw pushed. "As deputy is is my job to help care for the Clan. I'm there to help every cat from kit to elder."

"It's Patchpelt," Goldenflower finally mewed. "He and I were never mates. Well, I loved him at least. But it didn't work out. My kits were all I had and now one's an apprentice and the other is in StarClan. I feel so alone."

"I see." Tigerclaw was silent for a long time. Goldenflower wondered if he even cared or if he was just trying to be nice.

The great tabby shifted slightly closer to Goldenflower. He was so tall her head barely reached his shoulders. The scar across his muzzle shone silver as he turned his head towards her.

"I actually know how you feel. Do you remember my parents? Pinestar abandoned ThunderClan to live the soft life of a kittypet," Tigerclaw's voice wasn't mad. Just terribly sad. "It wasn't just a Clan he left behind. My mother, Leopardfoot, was devastated. She never grew close to any cat after that, not even her own kits. My littermates Mistkit and Nightkit both died young. And so, at only four moons old, I was completely alone." Tigerclaw's voice trailed off quietly.

Goldenflower stared at her deputy in astonishment. She'd never seen the great warrior so vulnerable. He was crouched low with his ears pinned back. His amber eyes were wide and glazed with memories. Only the twitching of his tail betrayed the fact that he was in fact still alive. For a moment he appeared to be an oversized kit not ready to face the world.

"Anyway," the dark tabby gave himself a shake, snapping out from his thoughts. "Things weren't all bad. I was apprenticed to Thistleclaw and he was as close to kin as I ever needed. I have friends within the Clan and have even worked my way up to deputy. I know you feel lost, Goldenflower, but trust me it's not true. Things do get better."

A soft purr rose at the back of Goldenflower's throat. Her heart still ached but she felt better knowing that she wasn't the only cat to go through such times.

"Thank you Tigerclaw. I really appreciate you telling me this."

"Yes, um, well," Tigerclaw had resumed his usual chilled persona. "I'd rather you didn't speak of this to any other cat. I'm not one for gossip."

"It's okay. You're secret's safe with me."

"Secret?"

"Yes," there was laughter in Goldenflower's mew. "That you actually have a heart."

Tigerclaw rolled his eyes and stood up. "Come on, we should head back to camp. I'm not returning with no prey." He started away but not before a Goldenflower could see the amused twitch of his whiskers.

# Chapter 3

The two cats returned to camp just as the sun began to sink between the trees. Each carried fresh kill that they'd managed to catch along the way. Tigerclaw dropped his catch on the fresh-kill pile and began addressing orders to the cats around him.

"Mousefur, you will take Greystripe and Fireheart for the evening patrol. I want fresh markers along the ShadowClan border. Take Brackenpaw too."

The small brown she-cat dipped her head and hurried over to where Fireheart and Greystripe were sharing tongues. Goldenflower sat and watched as they left camp. Around her warriors were sharing tongues and getting ready to settle in for the night.

"Goldenflower, I assume you'll be back in the warriors den?" Tigerclaw didn't wait for an answer. "Dustpaw collected fresh moss for the elders today. I think there's some left if you want some bedding?"

"Oh. Yes, thank you Tigerclaw." Goldenflower could already see the pile of green by the entrance to the den. She padded towards it and was surprised to feel the deputy following at her heels.

"I'll help you, if you want." He offered. Yet again his amber eyes had softened into liquid gold.

*Why is he being so kind?*

Without a word Tigerclaw grabbed a wad of moss in his jaws and trotted away to the warriors den. Goldenflower followed behind slowly. She'd always admired the great warrior but they'd never been close. Was it that he too needed a friend?

"I sleep here." Tigerclaw gestured to a nest towards the centre of the den. "You can sleep next to me if you'd like."

"That's very kind." Goldenflower murmured. She began scraping the moss together into a nest. She could feel the dark tabby's amber gaze boring into her as she worked. A million questions were brewing in her mind but she remained silent. The day had been long and emotionally exhausting. Goldenflower circled her new nest twice then curled up in a tight ball.

* * *

Goldenflower's dreams were troubled. Shapes and colours blurred in and out of focus. Everything was dark and foggy and strange eyes stared at her through the gloom.

"Hello?" She called out. "Is anyone there?"

The tip of a dark ginger tail appeared in the corner of her vision. Goldenflower raced after it. The mottled tom that it belong to whirled around. The light of battle glowed in his green eyes.

"Redtail?" Goldenflower gasped.

It was ThunderClan's old deputy. He stood before Goldenflower every bit alive as she remembered him.

"What are you doing?" He meowed. "RiverClan's lost. Sunningrocks are ours- hey! What are you doing?"

The small tom was backing away. He seemed to be staring at someone that Goldenflower could not see.

The shadow of a cat leaped on top of Redtail. Goldenflower watched in horror as her old deputy went limp beneath phantom claws. She screamed and fled into the darkness of the forest.

"Goldenflower!" Someone was calling from behind. Was it the shadowcat that killed Redtail? "Wait! Please stop!"

Goldenflower continued to run as fast as she could to get away from the battle. Had she just witnessed Redtail's final moments? Who was he talking to?

Ahead, a small shape had slipped out of the ferns and was sitting in a patch of sunlight. It was a kit with tufty black and ginger fur.

*Lynxkit!*

Goldenflower charged toward her kit, ready to shower him in all of the love she still had left in her heart. But as she got closer the tiny body began to fade. Goldenflower skidded to a halt in the exact spot her son had stood only seconds ago.

"My kit!" She wailed. "Come back!"

"Lynxkit plays among the stars now." A deep voice meowed from behind.

Goldenflower's pursuer had caught up. She slowly turned around to face him. Her muscles were tense and ready to fight. All of that faded away when she saw him. Golden fur and kind eyes.

"Lionheart." She breathed. ThunderClan's deputy after Redtail. One of the finest warriors to ever grace the Clan. And, most importantly, her brother.

"Goldenflower." A deep purr rumbled in his chest. "It is good to see you, sister."

Starlight glimmered on his whiskers and paws. A strange wisdom glowed in his eyes although he seemed younger than Goldenflower remembered. As though the senior warrior was back in the prime of his life.

"I have a warning for you," He meowed. "A message from StarClan."

Goldenflower shivered. "For me? Brother, what is going on?" She tried to reach out to him and burry her muzzle in his golden fur but the great warrior was beginning to fade.

"Beware the darkest warrior." He meowed. By then all that Goldenflower could see of him were his eyes and the starry outline of his ears. *"Beware the darkest warrior."*

**A/N: What's cringey and very rushed? My writing of course!! :D**

# Chapter 4

Goldenflower awoke thrashing and covered in sweat. Her hind paws kicked out violently and connected with someone's head. It was Darkstripe and he instantly leaped to his paws hissing and spitting.

"What in the name of StarClan was that?" He snarled at Goldenflower. "Watch what you're doing, mouse-brain!"

"I-I... It was an accident. I had a bad dream," Goldenflower flattened her ears down in shame. Her first night back in the warriors den and she was behaving like a kit.

"Well save the sob story for a warrior who cares. I have the right mind to-"

"Darkstripe," Tigerclaw's eyes were still shut and his voice was groggy. He lay curled up in his nest with his nose tucked under one paw. Only the occasional twitch of his tail betrayed that he was still awake. "If you can't keep that mouth of yours shut you may as well make it useful and go hunt!"

"What? Tigerclaw, she kicked *me!*" Darkstripe flinched away from Tigerclaw's words as though he'd been struck.

"And you annoy *me!*" Tigerclaw rolled over and stretched. It was clear he was done talking.

"Stay away from me, flea-pelt!" Darkstripe threw the final insult at Goldenflower then stormed out of the den.

"Thank you." Goldenflower mewed to Tigerclaw as the angry warrior retreated.

The brown tabby was already snoring again. For a moment Goldenflower contemplated curling up against him and trying to sleep some more. Flashbacks from her nightmare still clung to her mind though and she tried to shake them off like cobwebs. She was in no hurry to return back to her dream world.

Goldenflower picked her way between sleeping bodies and left the warriors den. It was still dark outside but the stars were slowly starting to fade. Sunrise couldn't be too far away. Bluestar was already awake and sitting at the base of the high rock sharing a rabbit with Whitestorm. Goldenflower was just plucking up the courage to go and sit with them when she saw a familiar black-and-

white shape emerge from the apprentices den.

"Swiftpaw!" She meowed, rushing to her son. "You're up early!"

Swiftpaw ducked his head awkwardly as Goldenflower tried to fix up the messy fur on his head.

"I couldn't sleep," he admitted. "I was too excited. Longtail is going to teach me how to hunt today! I want to catch you a mouse."

Goldenflower's heart swelled with pride. Swiftpaw may have been small and his fur was still kitten-soft but there was a new light in his yellow eyes that shone with determination.

*He's growing up...* she realised with a pang.

"Oh! That's Longtail now!" Swiftpaw meowed excitedly.

The pale tabby was slowly emerging from the warriors den. He stretched and padded over to Darkstripe who was grooming himself sulkily in the faint dawn light.

"I suppose you'd better go join him." Goldenflower suggested with a gentle nudge. "Go on. Have fun."

"I will!" Swiftpaw squeaked before bounding over to the two warriors.

Longtail meowed an excited greeting to his new apprentice. It was clear that he was thrilled about his new duties as a mentor. Darkstripe too gave Swiftpaw a kind nudge. Seeing him to close to her son sent chills down Goldenflower's spine. She wouldn't be forgetting his aggression so easily.

The three toms walked past her to leave camp. Swiftpaw bounded ahead with his tail fluffed out and held high. Longtail followed closely, matching the younger cats pawsteps. He caught Goldenflower's eye as he passed her and gave her a wink.

"Don't worry, I'll look after him." He meowed.

"Thank you." She whispered.

Last was Darkstripe. He held his head high and refused to make eye contact with Goldenflower. Clearly he wouldn't be forgetting their run-in either. The sun was slowly climbing the sky but his grey pelt remained pitch. Darkstripe looked like a shadow slowly slipping over the ravine.

Goldenflower shuddered. What had it been that Lionheart has said? Beware the darkest warrior. Was Darkstripe the cat her brother had warned her of? Even his name hinted at it being the truth...

*No!* Darkstripe was a loyal ThunderClan warrior. Sure, he wasn't always the kindest cat to know but he'd certainly never harm

another Clan-mate. No... Lionheart must've meant something else.

Goldenflower closed her eyes and let fresh sunlight bathe her face. She wished the stars were still visible. Was Lionheart watching now? Did he know how confused she was?

Did he even care?

**A/N: It actually bothers me a bit that there's basically no bond shown between Goldenflower and Swiftpaw in The Prophecies Begin. I know that this is because the Erin's were so busy focusing on her love for Bramblekit and Tawnykit and how she had to shield them from the Clan but... idk. I just want to shine some light on their relationship. Anyway, I hope you're enjoying the story so far!**

# Chapter 5

Almost two moons had passed since Swiftpaw's apprentice ceremony. Goldenflower was back into enjoying her warrior duties. Her kit was growing up and that was okay. Patchpelt's harsh words felt like a thousand seasons ago. As for Tigerclaw, well, he never left Goldenflower's side. When he wasn't tending to his deputy duties he and Goldenflower would hunt or share tongues together. This has only worsened the rift between Darkstripe and Goldenflower. The two seldom spoke but harsh glares were enough to remind Goldenflower of his jealously. And she couldn't blame him, really. She was stealing his best friend.

Lionheart had not presented himself in her dreams again. His words still rang in her ears though every time she saw Darkstripe. *Beware the darkest warrior...* Surely Tigerclaw would have done something if his friend was evil? After all, Tigerclaw was ThunderClan's most loyal warrior. There was no way he would ever associate with a traitor.

"Goldenflower!" It was Frostfur who interrupted Goldenflower's thoughts. "I was wondering if you wanted to go for a wander with me?"

"Oh, yes!" It'd been ages since Goldenflower had spent time with the white queen. She missed sharing the nursery with her. "But what about Thornkit and Brightkit?"

"I've just been speaking with Bluestar," Frostfur's eyes were shining with pride. "They'll be apprentices any day soon! I'm sure they'll be fine if I slip away for a while."

"That's great!" Goldenflower gave the white queen a gentle nudge. "I'm so happy for you and the kits!"

The two she-cats left camp and began the climb up the ravine. It had been a couple of days since Goldenflower had run and she found that she was puffing more than Frostfur by the time the reached the top.

"Come on!" Frostfur meowed. "I've been cooped up in that nursery too long!"

Without another word the white she-cat bolted through the trees. Her back paws sent of little sprays of muddy snow as she ran.

Goldenflower took off after her. For some reason her paws seemed to be moving slower than usual and she had a hard time catching up.

Where had Frostfur gone? Goldenflower stopped and stared around the gloomy forest. Her sides heaved as she fought to catch her breath.

*Thump!*

Frostfur sprung up out of the snow and slammed into Goldenflower's side. Then she darted away and gave her a playful bop on the nose.

"Slow-slug!" She giggled.

"Hey!"

Goldenflower bounded forward and gave Frostfur a light shove. The white cat rolled across the ground and batted at Goldenflower's belly with sheathed paws.

Suddenly Goldenflower felt a stab of pain in her stomach. She dropped to the ground and screwed up her face in pain. Frostfur immediately snapped out of her playful mode and crouched at Goldenflower's side.

"Did I kick too hard?" Her voice was laden with concern. "What's going on?"

"I... don't... know..." Goldenflower staggered and flopped down on the ground. Her muscles ached from running and her belly hurt. "I don't feel well."

"I'll go get help. Wait here." Frostfur sprinted away like a flash of white lightning.

It wasn't long before she returned with three cats in tow. Tigerclaw and the newly named warriors Dustpelt and Sandstorm. Judging by the scents of fresh-kill on their fur Goldenflower guessed they must have been on a hunting patrol.

"Goldenflower, how are you feeling?" Tigerclaw's voice was it's usual cool calm but his amber eyes betrayed his worry.

"I'm fine. I just... feel sick. I need to see Yellowfang."

Tigerclaw gently gripped her by the scruff and pulled her to her feet. Goldenflower had to lean against him to stop her paws from swaying. Dustpelt moves to her other side and together the two toms half-carried her back to camp.

* * *

Yellowfang's den was warm and smelt of herbs and flowers. Goldenflower sank down into the mossy floor and sighed with relief. She wasn't feeling sick anymore. Just incredibly tired. Tigerclaw hovered over her as Yellowfang nosed her flank gently and asked for details about what had happened.

Yellowfang turned to face Tigerclaw. "I need to speak to Goldenflower alone."

Tigerclaw opened his mouth to reply and for a moment Goldenflower thought that the dark tabby was going to insist on staying. But instead he dipped his head and retreated.

"Please be careful." He meowed as he left.

Once he'd disappeared Yellowfang sat down with her tail tucked over her paws.

"You should be fine, Goldenflower. You just need to lessen your activity. It might be time to move back into the nursery."

"What?" Goldenflower's eyes flew open wide. "The *nursery?*"

Yellowfang tipped her head to one side. "Goldenflower... you're expecting kits. Didn't you know this?"

"No. No I didn't realise."

It made sense. Her fatigue. Recent weight gain. Slowness. The belly pain.

"Is Patchpelt the father? I thought you two weren't together anymore?"

"No. Patchpelt isn't the father. I... I would prefer to keep this information to myself for now."

Yellowfang nodded. "That's fine. I won't tell anyone about our conversation if you don't want me to."

"Thank you Yellowfang. I need to go talk to the father if that's okay."

"Of course." The grey medicine cat dipped her head and moved to let a Goldenflower leave the den.

Goldenflower's head was spinning. There was only one thing in her mind that she could think of.

She was carrying Tigerclaw's kits.

# Chapter 6

"So, are you going to tell me what's wrong or do I have to guess?" Tigerclaw teased.
Goldenflower stared at her paws. Three days had passed since she'd found out that she was expecting kits. It was time to tell Tigerclaw. She remembered when she'd had the same talk with Patchpelt. She'd been thrilled and had foolishly thought that it meant they were in love.
She wouldn't be making the same mistake twice. Having kits with another cat didn't mean they were a family. Tigerclaw had the right to know that the kits would be his but if he chose to step away, she wouldn't stop him.
"Tigerclaw... The other day when I was sick," she began slowly. The words stuck in her throat like burs. "Well, I'm not sick it turns out. I'm, well, uh," *Just spit it out!* "Im pregnant."
Tigerclaw's entire body froze. It was as though the dark tabby was made of stone. He stared at Goldenflower with his mouth wide open. She was back at staring at her paws. Her ears burned with shame. It was coming. The rejection.
"They're yours." She murmured.
Tigerclaw snapped out of his daze. "No, they won't be my kits." He meowed calmly.
It felt as though an icy claw was scraping through Goldenflower's heart. The pain was blinding. And then a Tigerclaw spoke again: "They'll be *our* kits!"
He moved forward and gave her a very gentle lick on the top of her head.
"Wait... you're not upset?" Goldenflower's head spun. Had she heard him wrong?
"Goldenflower, surely you've realised by now that I care for you an awful lot." Those amber eyes... So breathtaking. "My whole life I've been seen as brave. But the truth is I've been scared. Scared of admitting my feelings. But not anymore. Goldenflower, I love you."
It was Goldenflower's turn to stand with her mouth open. She felt one of the kits kick inside of her belly. Tigerclaw nuzzled her flank and twined his tail with hers. He was so gentle.

"I love you too." She meowed, her voice barely above a whisper.

* * *

"How many do you think there will be?" Tigerclaw asked.
"It's hard to tell really. Yellowfang thinks it'll only be a small litter though. One or two kits."
The two cats lay stretched out on the warmth of Sunningrocks. Goldenflower's belly was round and heavy with the weight of kits that would soon be born. Tigerclaw lay with his head resting on her flank. Goldenflower had never felt so happy in her entire life.
"I can't wait for them to born. They'll be the finest warriors ThunderClan has ever known!" Tigerclaw yowled.
Goldenflower gave him a playful swat with her tail. "Calm down. That's many moons away. Let them be kits."
Tigerclaw was already off on a tangent. "I already know who I want to mentor them. I'm going to request that Bluestar let's Darkstripe mentor one of them. Dustpelt too. Maybe Longtail once Swiftpaw becomes a warrior. I won't be letting that kittypet Fireheart mentor any kit of mine that's for sure! And I'll make one of them my deputy once I become leader of-"
"Woah, woah hold up. Once you become leader? I think you're getting a bit ahead of yourself." Goldenflower meowed.
Tigerclaw looked away. "Yes, well... I just want what's best for my kits. My father didn't bother to raise me and that's something I still think about to this very day. Pinestar was no father to me, really. I'll never be like that. I'll always be there for my kits, until the moment I take my last breath. Maybe even when I'm in StarClan."
"I know," the golden queen purred. "You're going to be a great father."
"And you're already a great mother. Swiftpaw is turning into a fine warrior." Tigerclaw praised. "Patchpelt was a fool to give both of you away. But I'm glad though. We can have a family now Goldenflower."
A purr rose in Goldenflower's throat. She gave Tigerclaw's ears a wash and admired the way his brown for shone like copper in the light. And just for a moment everything was perfect.

**A/N: I honestly believe that the main reason Tigerclaw fought so hard to bond with Brambleclaw and Hawkfrost when they**

**were young warriors was due to the fact that he himself didn't have a father. I know he was also using them as pawns but... I think not having Pinestar in his life also made him want to be a better father too. What do you think?**

# Chapter 7

"Great StarClan it hurts!" Goldenflower wailed.
She lay twisting in the moss of the nursery. Her swollen flanks heaved with effort and she fought to breath through the pain. Yellowfang was standing over her with Cinderpaw at her side.
"I know, and you're doing so well." The grey she-cat rasped. "Now, Cinderpaw, place your paw on her flank. What can you feel?"
The smaller grey cat tentatively reached out with a paw and rested it on Goldenflower's side. It was her first time assisting with a kitting and her blue eyes were shining with excitement.
"Oh, they're moving!" She squeaked.
A ripple passed through Goldenflower's body. She cried out again and dug her claws into the moss. Surely there wouldn't be much longer? Swiftpaw's kitting had been much faster.
"It won't be too long now," It was though Yellowfang had read her thoughts. "But the first kit is turned around the wrong way so it'll take a bit more effort."
"What's wrong?" Tigerclaw stuck his broad head in through the nursery wall. "I can help!"
"Get out!" Speckletail hissed from her nest. "You toms don't have a clue!"
Tigerclaw bared his teeth at the older queen but retreated.
Goldenflower breathed a sigh of relief. Originally she'd wanted him at her side for the kitting but he'd made too much fuss and had tried to boss Yellowfang around despite knowing nothing on the matter. Brindleface had escorted him out with Ashkit and Fernkit. Goldenflower needed privacy.
"It's coming!" Cinderpaw gasped. "I can feel it!"
Goldenflower gritted her teeth and pushed. A tiny dark bundle of fur slithered out onto the floor. Speckletail rushed forward and began to lick it to life. Her kit, Snowkit, watched from his nest with wide anxious eyes. The dark newborn began to squirm and squeak beneath Speckletail's tongue.
"It's a tom!" She purred to Goldenflower.
Goldenflower lifted her head towards her new son but another wave of pain made her stop.

"Hang in there Goldenflower," Yellowfang's eyes were glittering in the dim light. "There's one more kit to come. Ready... Push!"
The second kit arrived and Cinderpaw placed it at Goldenflower's forepaws so that she could lick it herself. This kit was lighter than the other. It's damp pelt was dappled with brown, ginger and white.
"A she-cat." Goldenflower murmured. "So beautiful."
The tom kit had left Speckletail and was kneading Goldenflower's belly with tiny paws. She moved his sister beside him so that they could suckle.
"Right. Cinderpaw I think our work is done. Congratulations Goldenflower you have two healthy kits!"
"Thank you both." Goldenflower couldn't take her eyes off the tiny bodies nestled against her own. The pain was worth it. "Can you please send Tigerclaw in?"
"Of course." Both medicine cats retreated and it wasn't long before Tigerclaw was shouldering his way into the nursery.
"Look at them!" He was quivering like an excited kitten. "Look at how beautiful they both are! Goldenflower look at what *we* made!"
"I know," she purred. "They are perfect."
Tigerclaw laid down beside her with his body curled against her own. His amber eyes never strayed away from his kits.
"Tawnykit." He meowed, nudging the little she-kit. "For the beautiful colours of her pelt."
"I like it." Goldenflower purred. "I was thinking Bramblekit for the tom."
"Why's that?" Tigerclaw's ears pricked.
"Because of these." Goldenflower nudged the kit's paw with her nose. Tiny white claws poked through the kitten fluff. Not only had he inherited his father's looks, he also had extremely sharp claws.
Tigerclaw let out a *mrrow* of laughter. "Bramblekit. I like it. Bramblekit and Tawnykit. These kits will have a great destiny, Goldenflower. Our kits will change everything, mark my words."
Goldenflower was about to ask him what he meant exactly but she was distracted by something in the corner of her eye. Lionheart was standing in the den too, looking down on the kits. His yellow eyes were clouded with sadness.
"The darkest warrior..." he whispered before fading into the shadows.
Goldenflower whipped her head towards Tigerclaw to see if he'd seen Lionheart. The great warrior showed no sign of noticing the

starry watcher. He was gently licking Bramblekit as he suckled. Bramblekit's damp fur appeared almost black in the fading light. So dark.
Goldenflower shuddered. Was Lionheart warning her about her own kit?

**A/N: No don't be daft Goldie. I think we all know who Lionheart is warning you about :P**

# Chapter 8

Four kits lay nestled in the moss at Goldenflower's belly. Two days had passed since Featherkit and Stormkit had been brought to ThunderClan. At first Goldenflower hadn't wanted to nurse the foreign kits... but loosing Lynxkit was still too fresh in her mind. No kit would suffer under her watch.

"Are they okay? They seem to be sleeping an awful lot." Greystripe stressed.

Goldenflower had to refrain from rolling her eyes. The heartbroken grey tom watched over his two kits like an anxious queen. Always asking questions and such. She needed some space.

"That's because they're only two days old," she explained tiredly. "Kits sleep a lot when they're first born. See, Bramblekit and Tawnykit are also asleep."

"And when they wake up you'll feed them right?" Greystripe's yellow eyes were wide with concern. It was as though he thought the kits would be tossed out of ThunderClan at any given moment.

"Yes, Greystripe," Goldenflower sighed. "They will suckle when they are hungry. Speaking of hunger- I would really love a fresh mouse. Would you mind catching me one?"

"Huh? Oh yes, of course. I'll catch *two* for you!" Greystripe vowed. He gave each of his kits a quick lick goodbye before skittering out of the den.

"He's quite the helper," Brindleface purred with amusement from her nest. "I wish I had a tom at my paws like that!"

"Oh, you're welcome to him. I can't get a moments break from his fretting!" Goldenflower groaned.

"If you need space, I'm sure Tigerclaw can put him to work." Brindleface offered.

Tigerclaw. He'd been so proud the day the kits had been born. And so furious the day Greystripe's kits arrived. Goldenflower felt her heart beat faster as she recalled the conversation between them the day before.

*"What was I supposed to do; let them starve?"*

*"You're supposed to put the Clan first. Our kits first!"*

*"These kits are half ThunderClan. They deserve to be here just as*

*much as our kits do. We'll be a family... just a bit bigger than expected."*

*Tigerclaw's whole body froze. His lips draw back in a snarl and he shoved his face into Goldenflower's. "They are not our kits. They never will be. There's just you and me and Brambkekit and Tawnykit."*

*"What happened to putting the Clan first?" Goldenflower argued.*

*Tigerclaw lost his temper and smacked Goldenflower in the head with the heavy paw. The impact of the blow sent black dots swimming across her vision. The she-cat fell to the forest floor in a daze. Everything spun...*

Tigerclaw had been devastated. He hadn't meant to loose his temper. He loved her. Goldenflower knew this. She'd hurt him. And yet, he'd hurt her worse... Goldenflower hadn't told anyone about what had happened and she didn't plan on it. But things had to be fixed between her and her mate.

"Can you watch them for me?" Goldenflower flicked her tail towards the sleeping bundles of fluff. "I need to talk to Tigerclaw."

"Of course." Brindleface purred.

Goldenflower padded out of the nursery and emerged blinking into the ThunderClan camp. Tigerclaw was sitting alone at the base of the high-rock washing himself. He paused mid-lick as Goldenflower trotted over.

"Can we talk?" She puffed.

"There's nothing to say." Tigerclaw meowed gloomily.

"I don't want this to be the end of us!" Goldenflower blurted out. "Please Tigerclaw. I've already been left by one mate. Are you going to stop loving me too?"

Tigerclaw's amber eyes flashed with anger. "Stop loving you? Goldenflower I *do* love you! But... well, things are difficult right now for me. I'm trying to fix the Clan and-"

"What do you mean? Bluestar is leader. And you're barely in camp these days. You're always disappearing. Where are you sneaking off to?"

"I'm not going to sit here and fight with you Goldenflower." Tigerclaw's head was bowed. "As I said, there's nothing more to say." He stood and fluffed out his fur. "I'm on the border patrol, I'll see you later." The brown tom took a few steps away and suddenly turned to give Goldenflower a quick lick on the cheek. "I promise things will be better soon."

"I hope so." Goldenflower whispered.

*A/N: Ah so I kind of forgot about this fanfic. Oops. Here we go though. Tigerclaw's an abusive piece of shit. Only two more chapters to go!*

# Chapter 9

Tigerclaw's battle cry ripped through the eerie silence of camp. He'd only left Goldenflower moments ago but must have scented danger not far outside of camp.
"ThunderClan, to me!" He yowled, charging through the bracken. "Protect the queens and elders! Goldenflower, get in the nursery *now!*"
"What's going on?" Greystripe had just returned to camp with two plump mice dangling from his jaws.
Goldenflower had just opened her mouth to demand the same thing when more battle cries sounded. There was a sound of thudding paws against the leaf-strewn ground and then screams as the camp suddenly exploded into a mass of fighting cats. A scrawny grey she-cat pounced of Goldenflower and dug her teeth into the scruff of her golden mane. Goldenflower snarled with fury and rolled over, squashing the she-cat beneath her. She leaped to her paws and dragged her claws through mangy grey fur, leaving a trail of liquid scarlet. Greystripe appeared at her side and together they sent the enemy cat fleeing into the bushes.

"Go to the kits. They need us to protect them." Greystripe urged. Panic flared in his yellow eyes and Goldenflower knew that there was no point arguing.

Fireheart's battle cry rang loudly and he arrived in the clearing with a fresh patrol of warriors. Tigerclaw had vanished into the sea of swirling pelts. Goldenflower raced over to the nursery with Greystripe at her heels. Brindleface and Speckletail were fighting a massive tomcat with torn ears. Despite his size, the tom was loosing to the two queens. They'd die before they let any cat harm their precious kits.

"Goldenflower!" Brindleface gasped. "What's going on?"

Goldenflower couldn't answer. She swatted at the tom's eyes with her claws and sent him staggering away. Her heart was thudding in her chest. There was something familiar about the big tom's scent. *ShadowClan?*

Dustpelt let out a screech from nearby. Blind Brokentail had pounced on his guard and was sinking his teeth into the dusty

brown tom's neck. Thornpaw appeared out of nowhere and knocked the crippled prisoner down. Of course! These cats were Brokentail's rouges, back for revenge.

"Momma!" A wail rose up from the nursery. Ashkit was peering through the den's walls, his sister Fernkit at his side.

"Back into your nests!" Goldenflower hissed, bundling the little grey kits away. She pushed through the nursery entrance with the other queens at her heels. Snowkit was squealing while Goldenflower's own four kits remained asleep, too young to understand the danger.

A hiss sounded through the nursery walls. A skinny grey head peaked through the entrance. It was the she-cat that Goldenflower had fought earlier, back for round two. She crept forward along the mossy floor and Goldenflower noted with satisfaction the streaks of blood left in her wake.

"Here kitty, kitty," the grey rouge rasped. "What's wrong, scared of another fight?"

"Scared you'll loose again?" Goldenflower snarled.

The grey cat hissed and lashed out with a paw to strike. Goldenflower blocked her and lashed her tail. She'd fight until death to protect her precious kits.

"What are you doing?" A second cat, a pale ginger tom called out from behind the grey she-cat. "Don't you realise? She's the ginger queen Tigerclaw told us not to touch! He said he'll flay us alive if anything happens to her or her kits!"

"What did you say?" Goldenflower shook her head. Had she heard him wrong? "How do you know Tigerclaw?"

The grey she-cat spat but said nothing. The ginger tom had already vanished and she skunk away behind him. What in the name of StarClan were they talking about?

"Retreat!" Someone yowled from outside. "There's too many of them!"

"Wait!" Goldenflower pushed her way out of the nursery and into camp. She searched for the ginger tom but couldn't see him anywhere. The rouges were all fleeing through the camp entrance. All except Brokentail who lay in a pool of blood outside Yellowfang's den. The elderly medicine cat grabbed him roughly by the scruff and dragged him inside.

Bluestar was standing outside of her den. Blood poured from a scratch below her right ear and her blue eyes were hollow and wide

with shock. Her sides were heaving, as though every breath was a struggle. Fireheart stood at her side, pressed tightly against her flank. The sun cast him in a pool of light and turned his pelt to flame. Bluestar was speaking to the Clan but Goldenflower couldn't quite make out her words. Cats were muttering too loudly.

A tall figure emerged from Bluestar's den flanked by Greystripe and Sandstorm. His tabby pelt was matted and streaked with blood. Goldenflower gasped aloud at the sight of her mate limping heavily. Tigerclaw's tail hung low and his amber eyes were glistening with pain.

And then Fireheart leaped to his paws. "Tigerclaw is a traitor to the Clan!" The flame-coloured tom's tail lashed with fury. "*He* brought the rouge cats here today!"

Tigerclaw lifted his amber gaze and scanned the gathered cats for Goldenflower. At last his eyes met hers. He mouthed a single, silent word.

*Sorry.*

# Chapter 10

The entire forest seemed to spin beneath Goldenflower's paws. She sunk her claws into the soft earth to keep her from tipping sideways. Around her warriors were crying out in disbelief. Fireheart stared down at all of them with his steady emerald gaze. He was talking, Goldenflower realised. Weaving a tale of Tigerclaw's treachery and attempt on Bluestar's life.

Goldenflower tried to listen but no matter how hard she strained her ears, all she could hear was the sound of Tigerclaw's warm purr rumbling in his chest as they'd shared tongues together. He loved her! He'd never put her or the kits in such danger.

The sight of her mate staggering towards the camp exit dragged Goldenflower back to the present. The once-great warrior now stood in shambles. His dark fur was matted and streaked crimson with blood.

"You're exiled from ThunderClan," Bluestar snarled. Her ribs were still heaving with exhaustion. "If any cat catches you on our territory you will be killed."

"You're a pathetic excuse for a leader, taking in kittypets and making them warriors. Where is your StarClan now, Bluestar?" Tigerclaw spat back. Blood dribbled from his lips. "I'll be back. And any cat that chooses to come with me will reap the benefits of sacrifice."

His amber eyes flickered back and fourth across the sea of cats. Goldenflower waited for them to meet hers. But they didn't.

"Darkstripe!" Tigerclaw called and flicked his tail. "Come."

Darkstripe flattened his ears to his skull. "No Tigerclaw." His mew was so soft that Goldenflower could barely hear him. "This is wrong. I won't join you."

Tigerclaw didn't falter. He carried himself as though his old friend hadn't uttered a word. "Longtail. I can promise you greatness if you come with me."

Longtail was sitting to Goldenflower's left. She could smell the scent of his fear rising off his pale pelt in waves. Swiftpaw sat on his other flank with wife terrified eyes.

"J-join you?" The light tabby chocked on his own words. "N-no! I'll

never betray my Clan. This is where I belong."

*Coward*, Goldenflower thought. Both toms were only trying to save their own pelts. Tigerclaw would never betray the Clan. He was just trying to make things right.

"That's fine, Dustpelt and I will rule together." Tigerclaw meowed smugly.

Dustpelt rose and padded through the sea of bodies to stand in front of Tigerclaw. For a moment Goldenflower thought the young tom was going to join Tigerclaw in exile. Then he spoke:

"I've always looked up to you, since I was a kit. I thought you were the greatest warrior in ThunderClan but now I see what you really are," Dustpelt's meow lowered to an angry hiss. "You're a traitor and a murderer. You killed my mentor and now you've tried to kill my leader. I will *never* follow you again."

Tigerclaw's lips drew back in a snarl. Dustpelt was already walking away, tail help high. Goldenflower's heart tugged. How could Tigerclaw's friends publicly betray him like this?

*Not me though. I'll follow you forever,* Goldenflower vowed silently. She could hear Bramblekit and Tawnykit stirring in the nursery. The four of them could have a new life together, away from a Clan that now stood in shambles.

"Leave." Fireheart spat from Bluestar's side.

Goldenflower waited for her name to be called. For Tigerclaw to meet her eyes and beckon her over with a flick of his tail.

"Keep your eyes open and your ears pricked Fireheart," Tigerclaw growled. "You'd better watch your back because oneday I'll be behind you. And you'll be crow-food."

Tawnykit squealed in the nursery. Goldenflower quickly glanced toward the entrance. She turned her head back just in time to see the tip of Tigerclaw's tail vanishing into the ravine.

Her blood turned to ice. He was gone. Just like that? He wasn't going to ask her to go with him?

*Wait! I'll go with you! I love you!* Goldenflower opened her mouth to yowl the words but nothing came out. He hadn't even said goodbye.

A feeling like leaf-bare spread through her chest. Goldenflower's heart felt as though it was no longer beating. It was dead. She wished she was dead. Not even StarClan would be able to take away the sudden pain. Goldenflower closed her eyes and sank to the ground. It was over. And she would never, ever love again.

**A/N Ayyyyy I rushed the ending but the book is finished now :) woohoo**